

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 1906

The
Chronicles of
Don Q.HOW DON Q.'s SWORD WAS DRAWN
FOR THE QUEEN.By K. and
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III.

After the death of Don Luis del Monte no event of great import occurred for a long period in the sierra. Certain captures were indeed made, and certain persons of small consequence were held to ransom. Don Q. had dealings with many sorts and conditions of men. Persons of divers callings had passed through his hands—sportsmen, politicians, merchants, a doctor, a couple of English M. P.'s, a high church parson of the same nationality, the German Count von Squeellette, an American newspaper proprietor and many adventurers. But when his men patrolling the lower passes, passed Garth Lator, they added to Don Q.'s list a gentleman of a profession with which he had never before come in contact.

Garth Lator was nearer 20 than he cared to own, full of the irrepressible spirit of youth, and of a fine blond that made it difficult for him to take things seriously.

Without much delay Don Q. sent for him. Lator was distinctly stirred by the romance of the situation, for the brigand was a man with an ominous record, and the captive looked with a good deal of curiosity at the fragile figure muffled in a cloak that crouched beside the great fire, spreading bloodless hands to the blaze.

"Good morning, senior. It is precious cold," he said.

His two guards sprang forward at the word and thrust him back roughly. Don Q. raised his head and looked full at this unusual prisoner.

"Excuse me taking off my hat, senior," the chief spoke at last in smooth, derivative tones, "but, as you say, it is cold. I regret that your visit to us should be in such unpleasant weather. Still we welcome you, for we have been in danger of suffering from dullness lately, and I foresee both pleasure and profit from your society."

Garth Lator was a very adaptable young man. "That's right," he said, good humoredly.

At a sign from Don Q. the guards retired to the door of the cave.

"Pray be seated, senior," he went on. "I perceive that you are English. One forgives much to the English."

"Sorry," said Lator, "if I've done anything wrong." Don Q.'s face cleared.

"I feel quite sure we shall enjoy each other's society while you remain with us," he remarked urbanely. "Let us at once get over the disagreeables of business, and then when we understand the position, we can dismiss all kindly considerations from our minds for the present. But first I must ask you to reply to a few questions."

Lator nodded.

"Quite at your service, senior. I hope I'll turn out satisfactory."

The chief looked him over. Garth Lator was a strong-built, clean-limbed young fellow, rather over the middle height, with marked features and sleepy gray eyes.

"I trust so," replied Don Q., with some emphasis. "Senior, you puzzle me. To what profession do you belong? You have the fingers of a man of practical mind and the eyes of a dreamer."

Lator smiled. The old pleasant smile was by no means lost on the chief.

"Well, if I had to sign a census paper I should write myself novelist or anyhow, author."

To his surprise Don Q. showed symptoms of pleased excitement.

"How interesting! I have never before in the course of my career had the good fortune to meet one of your calling. But of that later. We must, however, deal first with the little matter of your ransom."

"Ransom?" ejaculated Garth Lator, and he broke into a cheerless fit of laughter. Don Q. looked at him in surprise.

"You are amused, senior. May I be permitted to share in your amusement?"

"By all means, such as it is," said the lad. "You spoke of hoping for a ransom. The idea tickled me—that is all."

The brigand's livid eyelids flickered ominously.

"All my possessions are before you. The clothes I stand up in, 25 in English money and half a pocketful of the coin of the country, of which the delivery of your ransom permitted them to relieve me," replied Lator, unable for the life of him to avoid imitating the chief's elaborate manner of speech.

The brigand waved his emaciated yellow hand away.

"Your relatives—they must cherish you! I can well understand it! Then there is your government, rich as a dream, and pitiful. I have heard of a public subscription for a popular author thousands could be raised. Is it not so?"

"I dare say it is," Lator's lips took an ironical curve. "But, you see, unluckily I am not a popular author, only an unknown one—yet, Ingham, they have had some experience of ransoms before. Anyhow, Ingham told me plainly they were tired of paying them, and that I must take my chance. As for relations, I haven't one in the world who would give sixpence for me! And now you know how we stand."

"But this is terribly sad," exclaimed Don Q. softly. "I hope you have misjudged your relations and friends?"

But Lator shook his head. "It is, alas! nearly always so. I rarely take a fancy to one of our captives, but whenever I do so, it almost inevitably turns out to be one who falls with his ransom."

I assure you, senior, this fact forms one of the severest trials of my lot."

Don Q.'s face, beaked and sunken like that of the bird he resembled, was inclined courteously toward his prisoner.

"I will do all I can for you, Senior Lator," he said, after a short pause. "I will name but a little ransom, only \$2,000. I trust this can be raised—for your sake?"

Garth shook his head. "You won't get it. I'm not worth anything to anybody except myself. What are you going to do with me?"

"Alternatives are usually deplorable, but we will wait for fifteen days until you have an answer from your consul," said the chief.

"But the alternative?"

Don Q. sighed. "Alas, senior, you are so young to die."

Lator was conscious of feeling very young, and very human. The strong life in his veins chilled for the moment, but when he spoke his voice was as casual as before.

"What good will my death be to you?"

"My dear senior—there was regret in the soft sibilant tones that made the lad shudder involuntarily—"It is business. I have a terrible reputation to maintain. You must be aware of the enormous value of such a reputation to one of my profession."

"I see your point of view," Lator said judicially; then he laughed again.

Don Q. regarded him with increasing interest. This young man was certainly of a new type. Lator read the question in his eyes.

"Do you know," he said, "before I heard the alternative you have so delicately alluded to, I was congratulating myself on having fallen into your hands?"

He smiled his quaint smile. "It's a trifle hard after spending a couple of years in collecting rejection forms that the first really good thing to come in my way should turn out so crookedly."

"You traveled to get local color?" inquired Don Q.

"Well, you see," Lator looked oddly shy—"I'm not old. If a fellow hasn't got to have to get experience. Don't you think so?"

The chief felt his heart quite warm to this ingenuous Britisher.

"I know an author," he began, "who for years has seldom left his own hearthstone, yet his transcriptions of humanity are so original, so vitally true, that the world will be shaken with a new knowledge of itself when he publishes them. He has had opportunities of seeing the soul of man naked."

Lator pushed back his chair involuntarily. His imagination had divined the truth.

"Is yourself?" he cried, while the thought flashed through him—what sights had not those livid-lidded eyes looked upon?

"You are right. I have occupied my odd moments in compiling an autobiography. It will not be a dull book, and will tend to set me right in the eyes of those who malign me in the plains."

"They do give you a villainous character down there," admitted Lator.

"Well, for reasons which I have already mentioned to you, I am sometimes forced to adopt regrettable alternatives."

The chief stopped and looked resentfully at the door, where one of his men stood holding a letter.

The daylight had now grown stronger, and Don Q. went to the terrace outside the cave-mouth to read the communication. An odd sound made Lator look up. The chief stood in the center of the cave, shaken visibly by some fierce emotion.

"You have been to Malaga?" he asked abruptly. "Who was the chief?"

"Let me see," Lator considered. "A fellow from South America, calling himself Da Costa. He seemed to have a good deal of money."

"What was he doing in Malaga?"

"He seemed to be a man who has permitted himself to be misled by Da Costa. The chief grinned venomously. "You will know him as the Comte de Dieppe, or as he loves to call himself royally amongst us Spaniards, General Don Basilio."

"What? The Carlist general?"

"Yes. Here is a man who writes asking me to become a rebel, who offers me a free pardon as the price of my help. He is a mother defending her fatherless child against the plots of powerful and subtle enemies. Well, I have seventy men at his service!"

"Were it not for my misfortune as regards my lack of ransom, you might have seventy-one," exclaimed Lator, a little carried away.

"Senior, are you willing to risk your life for the queen of Spain?"

Lator's only reply was his expressive smile.

"The queen is already on her way to Malaga, where she is to make a progress through the streets on the 15th. Basilio's presence means that some infamous plot against her is being prepared. You have heard of this man?"

"He's pretty notorious."

"You may take my word for it, senior, he is even worse than the world believes him to be."

"It is at the man himself that I must strike!" the chief paused and laid a slim yellow forefinger on Lator's sleeve. "Are you willing, senior, to do a great service to the queen, and thereby to cause me to remit your ransom?"

"I am willing without the remitting of the ransom, senior."

"Corps of a scullion!" exclaimed Don Q. "I see our way into this man's presence."

"Our way?"

"Yes, two—alone!" The chief bent forward and whispered for some time into Lator's ear, breaking off at intervals to give way to terrible sibilant paroxysms of laughter.

As the young man listened, his face lighted up. Here was adventure undiluted!

"Don Basilio's plot is still in the egg—we must crack the shell a little prematurely," added Don Q. aloud, in his usual soft tones. "I foresee that Fate ordains you to hold a hand in a fine game. Should I be forced to kill you later, you will at least have lived to some small purpose."

The bleak evening had fallen and the lights of La Bien Venida at Malaga were twinkling out upon the chilling air, when a hooded carriage drove into the courtyard of the hotel. From it Lator descended, and standing upon



—SPREADING BLOODLESS HANDS TO THE BLAZE—

the marble step before the lofty main door, carefully assisted an elderly man to get out of the vehicle. This latter was a very fragile and thin personage, attired in the severe costume of a bishop of the English church. Under his great coat could be seen his apron and puny gaitered legs, but between the white tab at his throat and the curly-brimmed hat a beak of nose and a pair of fierce livid-lidded eyes peered forth to arrest the attention of any on-looker.

"Come, dear uncle," said Lator, "we have arrived at the end of our long journey."

At this moment the innkeeper appeared to meet them.

"I am desolated, señores, but my house is full," he began.

"Te, te, te," cried the bishop, irritably. "I am here, and here I stay. Do you know who I am? I am Rev. Dorys Bellingham, lord bishop of Britania."

The landlord hesitated. English visitors paid well, and were not from the point of view of Don Basilio dangerous.

"I have but one room, excellency."

"So? Put two beds into it. Be quick!" The landlord turned to Lator.

"Senior," he said in a low voice, with a glance over his shoulder at the masterful bishop, "can you not persuade the noble lord to try another hotel? There are many in the city."

Lator looked gloomily into the man's eyes.

"No power on earth could persuade him!" he replied, with tragic conviction.

"Come, come, lead the way! lead the way!" piped the bishop, peevishly, in spite of his now halting Spanish.

The guest rooms of La Bien Venida are built round an inner patio, paved in marble, roofed in glass, and decorated with many lofty palms. Into this the bishop advanced with his mincing

step, followed by the reluctant hotel-keeper. The sharp, sibilant tones were sufficiently raised to attract the attention of a tall and stout man who had been smoking a cigarette in one of the adjoining rooms. He came striding out.

"What is this noise about?" he asked angrily of the hotelkeeper. "Who is this? Did I not order you to keep the place clear of your pestiferous clients?"

In an instant the bishop had stepped in front of him.

"Pardon, senior, my coat is black, but it can be pulled off! Also I can let row a sword!"

The hotelkeeper stood aghast that any one should thus address the great General Don Basilio. That truculent personage seemed a good deal surprised himself.

"I do not fight with gnats!" he answered rudely. "Get rid of him," he added, turning away.

But the bishop's active figure was again before him.

"Yet I will not be brushed away," he cried, with sibilant imperiousness, "more especially by an animal like you!"

"Lator, who was enjoying himself hugely, felt it was time to interfere."

"I think, my dear uncle," he said, laying his hand on the bishop's shoulder, "that presently you will deplore having permitted your prominent virtue of Christian patience to desert you."

"True, true, dear nephew," said the bishop, sadly, pressing his thin finger upon his lips. "Your pardon, good senior," he went on, "my excuse must be that although I have strong hopes of ultimately succeeding, I have not yet entirely mortified the flesh. My fiery temper has even been a thorn in my side. Then seeing that Don Basilio was about to vent his rage in words, he added: 'Forget all I have said! I earnestly trust I have not frightened you!' The churchman's livid eyelids flickered up at Don Basilio's rufous face

and before that gentleman could recover his speech, he was trotting up the stairs, followed by his nephew and the hotelkeeper.

Don Basilio stood still, uncertain how to act. Just then the bishop's piping tones floated down from above.

"Te, te, te! I will remain! I am ill. And if you refuse me entertainment I shall be obliged to appeal to the authorities. Send at once for—"

Don Basilio went back to his cigarette.

So it happened that the lord bishop of Britania, or the man who masqueraded under that name, planted his camp well within the lines of the enemy; in other words, obtained lodging at the headquarters of Don Basilio.

The latter, worthy for a time did not know what to do. Should he insist on the departure of the peppery English cleric, or would it be wiser to let sleeping dogs lie? After half an hour's cogitation he decided that as he was in the presence of the two strangers in the hotel it might be still more awkward to bring himself and his people into prominent notice at the moment.

Basilio, who had closed the door in two languages, rated the hotelkeeper and finally dispatched a little note of apology to the bishop of Britania, which caused the man who received it to shake it from his fingers with contempt.

"So you see, senior, after all no harm has come of taking my own part," he said to Lator. "I knew my man. Had I allowed him to rough-ride over me he would, at that moment, have had us turned out of the hotel."

"Now, can you suggest a suitable illness for a bishop?" I am about to go to bed for two days."

"Go to bed?"

"Yes, it is an essential part of my plan. And, indeed, happily so. Don Basilio is no doubt meditating whether he should leave the hotel. If I cross

his path too often he may do so. That would be a misfortune, and ruin our hopes. But if I give out that I am very ill, he will simply indulge in pious prayers for my death, and thank the saints that my powers of interference have been providentially spoiled. I once had an English captive," he continued thoughtfully, "who developed indisposition. Is your chess adapted to the highest ranks of the princes of the English church?"

"Gout would be more dignified," suggested Lator.

"The gout it shall be. And tell them that I have no faith in the medical profession of this country, and that if a doctor presumes to enter my room I will cut off his ears."

"That would hardly be in keeping with your character," remonstrated the young man; "but if you will allow me I will say that we have telegraphed to the great gout specialist in London, Sir Charles Jenkinson, and that until he comes you will trust to your own knowledge rather than to local talent."

Don Q. looked up from the buckled shoe he was removing. "Excellent," he commented. "I foresee, Senior Lator, that you will one day become a very great writer indeed."

Lator carried out his part of the programme, and everything fell out as Don Q. had foreseen.

"The queen enters Malaga this afternoon," observed Lator, sitting down on the edge of the pallet he occupied in the bishop's room. "The royal progress through the streets takes place, as arranged, early tomorrow."

"Ah, then, we must act," replied Don Q., raising himself from his pillow. "This delay is very wearisome, senior. It has been in my mind to go down to desayuno, and pistol Don Basilio where he sat."

Lator grinned appreciatively.

"I'm afraid you would have been disappointed for Don Basilio always remains in his own room for desayuno, though he sometimes joins us at comedia in the evening."

Don Q. was out of bed in a twinkling and wrapped in his dressing gown. He was already bandaging one foot with a towel before he spoke.

"It is midday," he said, "a waiter has brought my invalid soup. Every person in the hotel is at this moment engaged in devouring food. The time has come, dear nephew."

"What are you going to do?" asked Lator.

"First we will concern ourselves with what you are to do," returned the chief serenely. "When you leave me you will descend and partake of desayuno, and do not forget, my dear nephew, to give evidence of anxiety at the increasing indisposition of your chess-playing uncle. I can no longer move—I but you are gifted with an imagination; I can leave the matter in your hands. Afterward you will go toward the stables, and there you will find a ragged fellow assisting with the horses. I venture to believe you will recognize a black-eyed scoundrel you have seen before in the sierra. When you catch his eye, be so kind as to place your forefinger of the left hand thus upon your chin."

"I understand," said Lator. The affair was becoming engrossing once more. He waited eagerly for Don Q.'s next word.

"As for me, my dear senior," resumed the chief, "you tell me that Don Basilio has been good enough to inquire about my health. It is very well, for I am about to pay him a visit to thank him."

Don Q. perched himself actively on Lator's shoulders, and they passed out into the empty passages of the hotel in their way to the quarters of the Carlist leader.

Don Basilio sat alone at his meal, and was in the act of raising a glass of wine to his lips when Lator, bearing his strange burden, paused in the doorway.

"That will do, dear nephew," piped the bishop; place me in a chair by my good friend Don Basilio, and go at once to your breakfast."

"What does that mean—that unwarrantable intrusion?" shouted Don Basilio.

Don Q. raised his pallid claw-fingered hand in deprecation.

"Not at all, not at all, senior," Lator heard him say, "I have come to thank you for the kind inquiries you have been making after me, and to have a little talk with you."

"In obedience to orders—no one ever disobeyed Don Q.—went down to desayuno, and sat through the meal full of excited anxiety."

As soon as he could leave the table without remark, Lator made his way into the stable yard, where, sure enough, he at once caught sight of the handsome, laughing face of Robledo, Don Q.'s most trusted follower, who was lounging at a door with a bucket in his hand.

Lator gave the signal, and receiving an angelic smile of intelligence in return, strode back to the bedroom of the bishop. What he wondered could have happened during his absence?

Don Q. lay panting in the bed, his ivory face even paler than his wont.

"Hullo, senior, what is the matter? You are ill? The real concern on the young Englishman's face may have touched the brigand. He smiled faintly.

"No, I am not ill, dear nephew. Pleasurable emotions arising from the interview I have been enjoying and the unusual effort of walking have intensified the action of my heart—no more."

"I hope that brute, Basilio," began Lator.

"No, no. On the contrary, I am deeply gratified at the upshot of our little meeting."

"Can you get at him, then?"

"At any moment," the chief assured him, with peculiar urbanity.

"But how, and where? The royal party have arrived, the streets are decorated, and—"

"My dear nephew, if you will trouble yourself to go down upon your knees, and look under my bed, I think you will find our excellent friend there."

"Don Basilio!" exclaimed Lator.

He noticed that the coverlet of the bed now swept the floor. Stopping, he raised it, to be confronted by the savage glare of Don Basilio's eyes as he lay on his back, gagged and bound.

Lator raised himself and looked down at Don Q. with a new admiration.

"How in the world did you manage it?"

"In the most simple manner, my son. I gave him the choice of coming quietly with me and submitting to my wishes, or having his brains blown out over his breakfast table."

"And he came with you?"

"Most certainly. He did not even hesitate. I had no time to spare and told him so."

"But what in the world are you going to do with him? We can't carry him away in our waistcoat pockets!" exclaimed Lator, entering very much into the spirit of the adventure.

"Let him remain where he is," said Don Q. "Tonight, when all is quiet, we will have a trial."

The disappearance of Don Basilio made an immense sensation in the hotel and every corner of it was searched excepting only the chamber of the poor bishop, who was suffering so acutely from gout.

When a waiter brought the news to that good-hearted personage, he ordered his bedroom door to be thrown wide open, and with feeble words and gestures urged the searchers to fresh effort.

After dark the search was abandoned by the Carlists for the time. The hotel assumed its usual quietude as the night deepened.

The chamber of the bishop was luckily somewhat isolated in consideration of his illness. About 2 o'clock Don Q. came and dressed in his ordinary attire, packing his bishop's costume in his valise, while he requested Lator to be so good as to drag Basilio out from under the bed.

"Take off the gag, my dear nephew," gently commanded Don Q. "I feel sure that the senior will understand that at a word or cry my sword will pierce his throat."

Don Basilio replied by a rumble of terrible curses.

"If you are not Satan, who are you?" Basilio humped his shoulders and looked sidewise at Don Q.

"You desire to hear? Then I will tell you my name. The brigand bent to the other's ear and whispered something.

Lator saw a look of stupefaction and incredulity pass across the purple face. "It is impossible!" he snarled.

"It is also known to a few intimates as Don Q." added the chief, suavely.

"Don Q.? Why you must have had my message?"

"It brought me here," replied Don Q. "I came to look upon the man who mis-

took me for a traitor."

"But you are—"

"Sequestered. True. Of the noblest rank of brigand. But it is now your turn to reply to questions."

And so, the trial began. Don Q. proved himself a past master in cross-examination, and in an hour the plot against the throne of Spain was laid bare in all its atrocity.

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